

Write Badly—Edit Well

with Mary-Kate Mackey



The First Rule of Writing Improvement

“A problem visible at any one stage of the writing process usually results from something that happened at the proceeding stage.”

- Jack Hart, *A Writer's Coach*

Be All You Can Be

Take on the role of three different editors at three different times.

1. **Pass One – The Wide Shot:** The primary question is “What’s the point?”
2. **Pass Two – The Medium Shot:** The primary question is “Is this the best way to tell this story?”
3. **Pass Three – The Closeup:** The primary question is “Are the technical elements—grammar, spelling, style, fact checking—correct?”

Correct Plant Naming

- **Species:** Genus – Capitalize first letter – *Davidia* – PLUS specific epithet – no capitalization on first letter – *involucrata* – all italicized – *Davidia involucrata*; or *Hydrangea paniculata* (NOTE: A specific epithet that is a name is not capped. Ex: *Magnolia wilsonii*)
- **Cultivar:** No italics, single quotes – *Fothergilla gardenii* ‘Jane Platt’ or add cv, no italics, no single quotes – *Fothergilla gardenii* cv. Jane Platt (NOTE: A person’s Latinized name in single quotes may be capped. Ex: *Olea europaea* ‘Wilsonii’)
- **Variety:** No italics – *Foeniculum vulgare* var. dulce
- **Hybrid:** Not capped and add sans serif x – *Fragaria* x *ananassa* ‘Quinault’
- **F1 hybrid series:** No single quotes, no italics – *Impatiens walleriana* Super Elfin Series
- **Lists/groupings of same genus:** Spell out genus first time, then capitalize and shorten subsequent names – *Polystichum braunii*; *P. munitum*; *P. neolobatum*

Note: In the U.S. all punctuation goes *outside* the single quotes because the single quotes are part of the plant’s cultivar name.

Trademark Brand Names

Trademark names are not scientific names and vary from country to country. They are printed in regular type with the appropriate symbol. The brand name can also be handled in block letters.

- **Registered trademark:** Encore® Azalea
- **Trademark:** Encore® Azalea Autumn Bonfire™
- **Patent:** PP – You can put the correct (but ugly) breeder scientific names in parentheses. Encore® Azalea Autumn Bonfire™ (*Rhododendron* ‘Robleu’ PP25074) or Diana’s Dream™ rose (*Rosa* ‘Ausfart’).

Bad First Draft—Good Edit Choices

Guide sentence—*In my article about conifers, I am saying there's a wide range to choose from*

Conifers suffer because they're too true blue, like a steady reliable friend. Unlike the showy temporary flowers that homeowners tend to become enamored with, that flash of flowers disappears and is late returning in the spring, the steadying influence of conifers for the winter months is overlooked. As far as design goes, conifers are the border collies of the plant world. they round up the blowsy, loosely flowing plants, and We all go for the flash. But conifers bring you what you need.

And what you need is structure and stability. Structure and stability are the very qualities that can work against conifers when purchases are made at a nursery or through a catalog. Because they seem boring. but in more subtle ways, conifers bring a variety of fascinating shapes and forms that will be there throughout the seasons, supporting your garden when their brightly-colored brethren have disappeared in winter.

And many conifers are brightly colored themselves. From the low, rounded bird's nest spruce (*Picea abies* 'Nidiformis')—it really does look like its common name—to the weirdly towering weeping Alaska cedar (*Chamaecyparis nootkatensis* 'Pendula', there's a shape and size that will perfectly support your garden plans. Choose a dwarf cultivar, such as *P.m.* 'Fletcheri'. At six feet tall, it's the perfect size for your back yard.

A low rounded form, such as the three foot dwarf arborvitae *Thuja occidentalis* 'Golden Globe', at the end of a bed of colorful flowers creates a stopping place for the eye. The upright forms, also called fastigate, are especially important for structure. They break up long horizontal sweeps of plantings with a sky-piercing challenge. Tall thin conifers frame views and block others. When you don't want to be distracted by anything beyond your fence, fastigate white pine (*Pinus strobus* 'Fastigata') will keep the focus on its bluegreen foliage inside your yard, without needing to completely block out the unwanted view beyond. An upright cultivar of western red cedar, *Thuja plicata* 'Arovirens', can make a hedge that requires little pruning to maintain its tidy habit.

Matching conifers such as the conical flanking a path can usher you into another part of the garden. Conifers can signal a change from one garden room to another. Conifers work well in formal situations that rely on plants of similar shapes to mirror each other, perhaps surrounding a center fountain, or wall waterfall.

Many conifers need regular water during droughts, especially when they're young. They'll also welcome a summer wash-down with the hose to stave off insects and keep them looking their best. However, there is one thing almost all conifers cannot tolerate—crowded conditions. Give them plenty of room, and don't let other plants lean on them.



Questions? Need more info? Contact me at marykatemackey@gmail.com. Write Better Right Now – The Reluctant Writer's Guide to Confident Communication and Self-assured Style (Career Press) is available at Amazon and independent booksellers.